



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Northwest Region
7600 Sand Point Way N.E., Bldg. 1
Seattle, WA 98115

December 13, 2002

Governor Dirk Kempthorne
Office of the Governor
700 West Jefferson, 2nd Floor
P.O. Box 83720
Boise, Idaho 83720-0034

Re: Building a Recovery Plan in Idaho

Dear Governor Kempthorne:

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) appreciates the commitment that you and your staff have demonstrated to promoting subbasin planning and recovery of listed Snake River salmon and steelhead. We are writing to ask if you would consider providing further assistance by helping to facilitate the development of Endangered Species Act (ESA) recovery plans for these species. It would be particularly beneficial if you could identify leaders and stakeholders within Idaho who might be appropriate for this important task.

NOAA Fisheries has a statutory obligation in section 4(f) of the ESA to develop recovery plans for all salmon and steelhead listed as threatened or endangered. We realize that Snake River salmon and steelhead have been listed for too long without the context and guidance that can be provided by recovery plans. We intend to build on efforts already completed and underway, such as subbasin planning, to accomplish this task in an efficient yet inclusive manner that builds on local programs to the greatest extent possible.

In its "Recovery Guidance for West Coast Salmon," (August 2000), NOAA Fisheries described a recovery planning process with two phases. Phase One entails the development of objective, science-based products that will inform us regarding the species' recovery criteria and limiting factors. Phase Two entails the policy and planning phase to develop recovery goals, actions and implementation plans.

For Phase One, NOAA Fisheries established two Technical Recovery Teams (TRTs), the Willamette/Lower Columbia TRT and the Interior Columbia TRT in the Columbia Basin. The Willamette/Lower Columbia TRT is working on recommendations for the 5 Evolutionarily Significant Units (ESUs) that spawn and rear below the Dalles Dam. The Interior Columbia TRT is responsible for developing recommendations for 7 ESUs, including the 4 ESUs that encompass runs originating in the Snake River drainage, Idaho: Snake River spring/summer chinook salmon, steelhead, fall chinook and sockeye. The Interior Columbia TRT includes two scientists from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Peter Hassemer and Dr. Charles Petrosky. We worked with your Office of Species Conservation prior to moving forward and establishing this TRT.



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The Interior Columbia TRT is making progress on their initial Phase One Tasks. Their targeted schedule is as follows -

- February 2003 - Preliminary population identification;
- April 2003 - Preliminary population viability goals for abundance, productivity, spatial distribution and diversity;
- September 2003 - ESU-wide recovery scenarios;
- December 2003 - Recommendations for habitat characterizations and for limiting factors/factors for decline analyses based on the integration of their analyses with subbasin/watershed assessments.

When the TRT completes these preliminary products, it would be most helpful to have an organized policy forum that can review the products, interact with the TRT, and provide policy guidance and input to the TRT and NOAA Fisheries. It would make sense for this policy forum to include those who are participating in subbasin planning, and also additional entities with expertise and a stake in recovery planning, whom you might recommend. Ultimately, it will be necessary to convene policy forums to work across state boundaries, particularly where we have ESUs, like Snake River steelhead and spring/summer chinook, that spawn and rear in more than one state. However, we believe it is best to begin now with more local policy forums and prepare to work in the future with those forums across state boundaries.

In summary, NOAA fisheries would like to work in partnership with a policy group in Idaho that can build upon existing efforts such as subbasin planning to help develop recovery plans. Our hope is that the State of Idaho would help facilitate this effort in coordination with the Snake River tribes and other governments as appropriate and that we could bring together diverse interests, expertise and authorities to build a recovery plan with a high likelihood of success. Please advise us of how you would recommend proceeding. We look forward to a meaningful partnership with the people of Idaho in developing this recovery plan. Please contact Elizabeth Gaar (503-230-5434) of my staff at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,



D. Robert Lohn
Regional Administrator

cc: Jim Caswell - Idaho OSC
Snake Basin tribes
Larry Cassidy - Council Chair
Judi Danielson - Idaho Council member
Jim Kempton - Idaho Council member